

**Minutes of the meeting of the
PARKS, OPEN SPACES, CONSERVATION & FOOTPATHS COMMITTEE
held on Monday, 16th April 2012
at the Freight House, Bradley Way, Rochford, Essex**

Committee Members Present: Chairman Cllr Mrs M Weir, Cllrs Mrs E Chippette, Mrs C Cunningham, Mrs K Cooke, Mrs L Haskew, R Patient, D Weir and ex-officio V Leach.

Also Present: Cllr R Mitchell, Cllr Mrs P Young, Dave Abrams – Groundsman and Frank Last – Chairman of the Essex Badger Protection Group.

72. Apologies for non-attendance at meeting:

Cllr Mrs J Barney (another appointment), Cllr Mrs A Heath (work) and Mr E Short, Chairman – Hawkwell Parish Plan Group. Members accepted the apologies tendered.

73. Briefing from Frank Last re. Badger Setts in Magnolia:

The Chairman welcomed Dave Abrams and Frank Last to the Chamber. Mr Last introduced himself as the Chairman of the Essex Badger Protection Group and he gave a detailed and informative briefing.

- He advised that 'the Badger' was protected by Law but there was no need to panic; providing the badgers were given due consideration, the parks operations could continue.
- He did not recommend advertising the presence of the setts because of potential badger baiting or people blocking up the holes.
- He warned that dog owners sometimes complained about the holes and informed of the process to be followed should a dog get lost within the tunnels. A waiting time of 48 hours must be observed and after such time the dog could be dug out only if it was barking – no barking would indicate it could be anywhere in the network of tunnels. Generally, the owner would remain at the tunnel entrance calling their pet to encourage them out and tempt them with food.
- The setts appeared to be thriving and this could be seen by the dig out of earth.
- Members expressed concern as to whether the bridle path would collapse due to the tunnelling. Mr Last had previously recommended the Groundsman block the hole on the path with a bit of concrete as there was still tunnel access each side of the path and that seemed to have held. He could see by the angle of the dig bearing down, with the path bearing up, that it hopefully would not get any worse.
- Asked how long badgers would remain in a sett, he advised usually all their life and that of the next generation; they would have to have a lot of disruption to want to move on.
- He advised the badgers were in the scrub area and they seemed to be expanding under ground but not on the surface and they worked around their sett to other holes.
- Mr Last was questioned that as a result of the tunnel entrance slightly encroaching on the bridle path, should a horse have an accident, would Council be liable by not advertising it? He responded that a horse should not

be that close to the fence but it was discussed and ascertained that the route was used by novice riders and occasionally riders on a gallop. Mr Last was of the opinion that horses should not be galloping on the bridle path, and that, in itself, could form a response to a potential complaint. Some discussion was had and Mr Last confirmed that a person on foot had the right of way.

- Asked how many badgers were present, he estimated about 10 adding it was difficult to be specific without seeing them. He thought there was a lot of activity but that didn't mean there were a lot of badgers.
 - The big mounds of soil were a give away to their presence and would attract attention. Asked whether this could be managed by keeping the area clear, he recommended monitoring the situation and the Clerk said he or Dave Abrams could move some soil from time to time. Alternatively, Mr Last suggested placing square net fencing around it but this wasn't thought practical.
 - Asked whether the Council had carried out a risk assessment, the Clerk responded the risks were being assessed by way of the visit and current presentation. The Clerk said he felt more confident that the setts could be managed given the awareness and it shouldn't be too onerous; the worst case scenario would be badger baiters but being so close to many houses lessened his concern.
 - Asked whether badgers had been removed and rehomed in another area, Mr Last advised Natural England would not grant a licence for that, adding a point to note that Essex were TB free. Also, it wasn't something that could be gotten rid of; the likelihood would be that more badgers would move in.
- Dave Abrams was invited to speak; he informed if there was ever a collapse of the path he would immediately contact Frank Last, tape off the area and it would then be up to ECC to make it safe.

The Chairman thanked Mr Last and he and Dave Abrams left the Chamber.

74. Declarations of Interest:

None.

75. To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2012 and to approve the destruction of the manuscript notes in respect of that meeting:

Members approved the Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th March 2012 as a true record and agreed to the destruction of the manuscript notes in respect of that meeting.

76. Parks – Action List Update:

The Clerk went through the action list.

- **Footpath signs – complete artwork and arrange siting:** Ongoing.
- **Clerk to seek RDC approval re QEII Field:** Cllr Leach informed this was mentioned in the office to a District Cllr who was interested in doing something to mark the Jubilee in one of the Parks and she promised to follow this up.
- **Co-operation between parishes re dog fouling:** Research continuing.
- **RDC complaint re Glencroft:** Nothing more heard. Item to be closed.
- **Resurrection of 'Friends of Magnolia':** Volunteers to be invited to May meeting. The Chairman was pleased to advise that Eddie Short, Chairman of the HPPG had put himself forward to join the group.

- **Contact educational establishments re. Point 2 of Operational Plan:** Cllr Leach moved this be removed from the list as the subject would be an automatic process, diarised in the office, and this was agreed.
- **Monitoring of Operational Plan on ongoing basis:** Agreed as above.
- **Agreed purchase of Ford Ranger:** Ongoing.
- **Agreed St Mary's request for storage in Magnolia Store compound for equipment:** Memo of understanding signed and storage hut installed.
- **Clerk to arrange replacement finger post on Ashingdon Road end of Footpath 7:** Chris Brown, ECC agreed to mount steel fixed finger post.
- **Clerk to sort HPPG recommendations:** Awaiting Working Group recommendations. Ongoing.
- **HPC to object to TPO removals:** Further information sought. Ongoing.

77. Financial Report:

The Clerk advised Council were now in the new financial year and the report referred to the year end. He pointed out £8,288 of 4941 Capital Purchase was for the Sidearm which would be transferred back from earmarked reserves at close down of accounts; therefore, effectively the total budget was spent, plus a little bit more, but it had come in very close.

There were no questions and Members accepted the Financial Report.

78. Consider co-option of HPPG Members onto Parks Working Group re. HPPG Action Points:

Cllr Leach recommended the Committee co-opt a number of HPPG Members and the Clerk speak to them separately as to who wished to be co-opted. The Chairman was content; she sought Members approval, which was given, and the Clerk was instructed to contact the HPPG.

79. Letter of Complaint from Resident (Pat James):

Cllr Mrs Cooke thanked Cllr Mrs Haskew for taking photographs showing areas referred to by the complainant. Members viewed the photos and discussed the findings.

The Clerk handed out a report of his response and went through this in detail. Cllr Mitchell volunteered that he had a large number of poppy seeds he would be happy to spread over the wildflower area once it had been cut and Members were content for him to go ahead.

Cllr Leach recommended the Clerk's response be converted into a letter of reply to the resident, including the proposal to sew poppy seeds. **Cllr Patient moved the recommendation and Members were in agreement.** Cllr Patient complimented the Clerk on the homework he had done and agreed with his comments, adding they were factual, not curt. He felt that the resident had been insulting to the Groundsman and he defended the Groundsman saying he worked really well. Cllr Patient advised that he recently took people to visit Magnolia Park and their feedback was very good and Cllr Mrs Haskew commented that she found Spencers Park to be delightful on her recent site visit.

80. Summary of decisions:

- Two actions to be removed from Action Update List and diarised in Office.
- The Clerk to communicate with HPPG to discuss its Members' co-option to Parks Committee.

- Clerk's response to be converted into letter of reply, including the proposal to sew poppy seeds.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.15pm.

Chairman

Footnote to Members: Please recycle this document from within the Full Council Papers for use at the next Standing Committee Meeting.